The highway roads stretch open and wide. The wind gushes every time a car passes us or vice-versa. I constantly expect sirens to start wailing in the background. To be honest I can't really say what I'd do in that scenario. I still don't know what I'd do in this scenario. I'm obviously not in my right mind at the moment so all bets are off.

I finally take a look at the gas gauge. Shit. It's almost empty. Stopping is one of the last things I want to do. The only thing that surpasses it is stopping dead in the middle of the high way. Needless to say, this decision is the easiest one I've made in quite some time.

I pull off of the freeway and start looking for a gas station. There's got to be one somewhere. We pass down so many streets, causing the frustration to climb. There's got to be a goddamn gas station somewhere. I'm not in the mood for this crap. I'm practically fuming by the time we get to one.

As I roll in I see cameras. That's just what I need: the whole world to see what the hell I am doing. I exit the car and walk straight to the front door as I have done since I was sixteen years old. I hate being in this situation. You can look like the perfect stranger yet you feel like every action is another faux pas, and the world has their eyes on you. My breaths are probably heavier than usual, but other than that I manage to blend in.

There are no quavers in my voice as I tell the cashier which pump to activate. My hand doesn't shake as I reach into my wallet. I do know my eyes are ricocheting off of every single wall. I thank God that the cashier is as dead to the world around him as I am, at least until he notices that I've been standing there staring at space for the past two minutes.

"Sir, are you okay?" the cashier asks.

"Yeah, I just um... can I buy a candy bar?"

I walk out the store and practically feel the chocolate melting in my hand. I open the car door and toss the chocolate bar Cassie's way, and slam it shut before anyone

has the chance to get a glimpse at her. I grab the pump and start filling up the car. And my eyes break off their leash. I start counting every passerby and look at them as if they were planning murder.

The dam breaks and my mind is flooded with fears. A guy stands by the front door of the convenience store, smoking a cigarette. He's staring right at me; right through me. A man and woman argue over a map in the parking lot. I could swear that every so often they shoot a look in my direction. Add that to the faceless on-lookers who notice my hand shaking frantically. I close my eyes and place my free hand on my temple. Sweat, really?

Finally a click. I take a deep breath. If I don't calm down right now, then we aren't going to make it far. I jam the pump back into its socket and get back in the car. The candy bar is still in its wrapper, sitting on Cassie's lap. She's just staring at it. I get in and get going before I decide to speak to her.

"I bought that for you," I say. She stares me. "It's chocolate. You're not allergic or anything, are you?"

"No..." she says and then she starts crying again.

I either focus on her tears or I focus on the repetitious highway. I use the closest tool in my arsenal. I begin asking questions with no purpose. I ask her if she's happy. I ask her if she's sad. I wouldn't know what to do with the answers if I got them, but they'd be nice to have. Her silence shouts out the clearest answer: she doesn't know why she's crying. It's probably been so long since she was allowed to. I don't say anything, just allow her to let it all out.

Cassie has fallen asleep against the hypnotic highway long before the dim twilight has left us. The candy bar is clutched in her hand. If she squeezed it any harder I'm thoroughly convinced that it would explode. I'll have to buy another one if we have the misfortune of needing to stop once more.

I wish Cassie was awake. Before I could focus on something that kept all of this

justified. Now it's just me facing morality, alone. She believed me so easily. Why? Am I really that much of a saint, or was Mr. Galvin that much a sinner? To keep the thoughts at bay I turn on the radio. Another regretful choice on my part.

"Police are issuing an AMBER alert for Cassie Galvin. Cassie Galvin, aged 8 was last seen walking home from school on Wilkerson Avenue, shortly after 3 PM this afternoon. She is about 3 ft 7 inches with green eyes and red hair. She was last seen wearing a pink shirt and a Hello Kitty backpack. The primary suspect at this time is a Mister Andrew Wright, who as described by Mr. Galvin had a very unusual interest in Cassie..."

I turn off the radio. That was the last thing I wanted to hear. Can't say that I didn't expect it though. An unusual interest? You have a very sick imagination Mr. Galvin. I wish I could blame you for that though. If I was unbiased and I heard that report I'd probably be on a goddamn manhunt by now.

Mr. Galvin, do you want Cassie back or do you just want me to rot in a cell? I'd really like to know. It would make it so much easier than just guessing which circle of hell I'll be able to find you in. In your sick, twisted world do you believe you have some sort of care for Cassie, or is she just your property? That can't be right. That sledgehammer you nearly killed me with was in pristine condition.

I try to figure out what the public probably knows about me. They definitely have a name and face, but do they have a car and a license plate? Mr. Galvin wants me dead and he has wanted me dead ever since I showed an "unusual interest" in Cassie, but how obsessive is he? Is he the kind of guy who just gives angry stares backed by a mountain of muscles, or is he the guy who scavenges through trash cans and breaks into garages to disable brake-lines?

Regardless, now I have the cover of night. I'll have crossed state lines by morning and have to deal with a whole new can of worms. It's still all so surreal. I'm not simply thinking like a criminal. I am committing a crime. Even though I have the best of intentions, I still feel like a filthy animal doing this. Each move makes me dread myself even more. Half of me still wants to turn around, even though it's way too late to do something so desperate.

I trap my consciousness in the present. Right now everything is fine. We're peacefully driving on the highway. My leg has finally stopped hurting. Cassie is safe. We're making progress. We're getting out of here. The car still has plenty of gas. And I'm tired. So very tired.

The last thing I need is to get into a car crash because I fell asleep at the wheel, but I obviously can't stay at a hotel. That would be idiotic. I pull into a rest stop and turn the car off. I sit back and just think. The nagging thoughts of better judgement have stopped. They know that it's way too late to change my course. Now they consider the best way out of this. Canada is nearly a thousand miles away. I won't say that it's impossible for me to get there unscathed, but it's not likely.

I get out of the car and just walk the parking lot. I need to clear my mind. I'm tired, but it'd be easier to sleep in a hurricane. I walk to the amber glow of the vending machines. I insert some money and grab a cola. It's warm and flat and the it's best thing that I've ever tasted. I see a shadow moving about my car. The cola falls to the ground as I run and burst in. Cassie is looking around, dazed and confused.

"Wh—where am I?" Cassie asks.

"You're in my car. Remember? Cassie, I'm here to help you."

"So it wasn't a dream?"

I shake my head. How I wish that it was a dream. Neither of us say anything for quite some time. We don't know what to say, at least I don't. If she's wondering if she made the right choice getting in my car then what could I possibly say to convince her that it was for her benefit? Eventually, she says that she's hungry. I take another trip to the vending machine.

We have a dinner of flat soda and bags of chips. I practically emptied those machines. They won't last us forever, but they'll be able to keep us from stopping provided we don't get sick of junk food.

After Cassie finishes her food she drifts back off to sleep. I take a look at my watch, a birthday present from long ago that comes with all of the bells and whistles: namely one of those temporary lights and an alarm. It's 10 PM now. I set the alarm for 4. I'm not taking any chances on this one. With a full stomach sleep comes a bit easier. It still takes forever though. I said earlier that sleep never fails to settle my mood. Today I've learned that there's a first time for everything.